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Soft Skills Practiced by Managers for Employee Job Performance in Ready Made Garments (RMG) Sector of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Soft skills are essential tools in maintaining employment relations as well as achieving high job performance. The purpose of this study is to explore the contribution of soft skills practiced by manager towards employee job performance specifically at RMG sector in Bangladesh. Data have been collected through two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and five in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis yielded four most commonly practiced soft skills in RMG which are communication, leadership, team work and critical thinking. This study reveals that there is a direct positive relationship between soft skills practiced by managers and employees' job performance. This study has three significant contributions. Firstly, this study is one of the very few studies on soft skills practice set on production based industry from non-western context. Secondly, this study facilitates future comparative studies on service sector as well as on cross-cultural perspective. The findings of this study has created further opportunity to conduct study on other production based industries available in Bangladesh and around the globe. Thirdly, the HR practitioners in Bangladesh specifically in production based industry will be more concerned from now about the practice of soft skills.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Managers Job Performance, Ready Made Garments (RMG), Bangladesh.

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Introduction

Soft skills have been a subject of life-long learning that have application in every aspects of life. Personal development of individual gets enabled and enhanced through the development of soft skills (Gibb, 2014). Soft skills include personal accountability, strong work ethics, positive attitudes, self-motivation, the degree of collaboration, interpersonal skill, conflict resolution, negotiation skill, people's adaptability and flexibility, the clarity of communication, creative thinking, and the ability of coaching and mentoring etc. (Taylor, 2016; Zaman, et al., 2018; Islam, Jantan, Hashim, Chong, & Abdullah, 2018). Learning success of soft skills influences individual behavior both in social and professional life (Gibb, 2014; Zaman, et al.,

2018). Soft skills practice has impact in developing social skills as well as professional competency. However, soft skills are often overlooked at work even though soft skills have important role play on day to day operations (Hossan, et al., 2012a; Zaman, et al., 2018). For organizational efficiency, technical skills and soft skills are equally essential in order to achieve growth and sustainability in this era of globalization and hyper market competition (Hossan, et al., 2012a). More specifically, soft skills practice helps the organization to achieve complex project by motivating and engaging employees (Azim, et al., 2010; Hossan, et al. 2012b; Zaman, et al., 2018) whereas technical skills are essential for production efficiency. In production based industry, more emphasize is given to technical skills acquisition and practice since this leads towards production efficiency. However, all the production based industries are not automotive and machine driven. Since human beings are involved as a major source for factors of production, their motivation and engagement at work are crucial for achieving organizational goal. Leadership skills of manager influence employees to be motivated for high performance (Anitha, 2014). Strong work ethics and the spirit of team work among the employees also help the organization to achieve success even in complex projects (Taylor, 2016; Willmot and Colman, 2016). Besides these three soft skills, there are many other elements like communication, critical thinking, adaptability, reliability that can be tested to know the influence of soft skills practice on the job performance of employees. On the other hand, studies found that employee trust is developed only when the managers at work deal with subordinates professionally, support them on their tough time, maintain positive and personal relationships in long run and have open communication (Robertson, et al., 2013). Soft skills like leadership, teamwork and work ethic make employees feel committed towards their job (Anitha, 2014; Bailey and Lene, 2013; Zaman, et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a need for practice of soft skills at work.

Practice of soft skills plays very significant role at every level of management (Pereira, et al., 2017). But, practicing soft skills at work is a cultural preference. The presence of soft skills in managing employees is comparatively low in production based industry as well as in non-western context like Bangladesh (Hossan, et al., 2012b; Zaman, et al., 2018). Ready Made Garment (RMG) in Bangladesh is a booming sector and this sector is contributing towards national GDP significantly. But the unrest among the employees and grievance at work are also observed for years in RMG sectors of Bangladesh (Hossan, et al., 2012a; Zaman, et al., 2018). As a solution, this research shows the importance of practicing soft skills by managers in manufacturing sector in Bangladesh like Ready Made Garments (RMG). It also draws a relationship between soft skill practice and employee performance. To explore the contribution of soft skills practiced by manager towards employee job performance, there are two research questions have been developed. First, what are the soft skills practiced across the management hierarchy in manufacturing sector of Bangladesh? Second, how do the soft skills practiced by managers influence the employees' job performance? As soft skills are overlooked in the manufacturing sector and technical skills are given more emphasise (Hossan, et al., 2012a; Zaman, et al., 2018), this study has four specific objectives to answer the above research questions. The first objective is to identify whether managers in manufacturing sector of Bangladesh practices different soft skills like communication, leadership, critical thinking, agreeableness, team-work, innovation, adaptability etc. Second, understanding the importance of using soft skills by managers for managing and supervising subordinates. Third, relating the application of soft skills and employee performance in the manufacturing sectors. Finally, developing recommendations and strategies for motivating RMG managers and top management authority of manufacturing sectors in order to practice soft skills.

Literature Review

Soft skills are keystones to success, and these includes the attributes that sit outside a person's professional qualification which helps individuals to understand the way of interaction, lead and communicate with others (Ibrahim, et al., 2017; Pereira, 2013). Soft skills refer to cluster of personality traits, social graces and facility with languages, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that mark people to varying degrees (Pereira and Costa, 2017; Tang, 2018). Soft skills are important in any organization to handle interpersonal relations, to take appropriate decision, to communicate effectively, to have good impression, to gain professional development (Schultz, 2008). Increasing globalization and internationalization has heightened the need for soft skills among business executives which can help them to affect the bottom line, influence effectiveness, and affect personal success (Azim et.al. 2010; Nang, et al, 2015; Schultz, 2008). Soft skills are not only necessary for a person's professional career, but are even more contributing to one's so-called social competence (Dharmarajan, et al, 2012; Nwokah and Ahiauzu, 2009). It can be a significant factor in helping people to become more effective leaders and managers in today's stressful and competitive working environment (Islam, Jantan, Hashim, Chong, & Abdullah, 2018).

Soft skills like leadership, decision-making, conflict resolution, negotiation, communication, creativity and presentation skills are essential for entrepreneurial success and for maximizing human capital in an organization (Tang, 2018; Wesley et al., 2017). Soft skills contribute to leading people, managing activities, managing resources and managing information (Zaman, et al., 2018). Leading people includes leading a team, leading yourself, conflict management, interviewing and selecting new members, delegation, coaching, networking, developing others (Goleman, et al., 2002). These are possible only through the presence of soft skills. When balanced with a good management team and an effective human resource management system, soft skills provide a way to get the highest return on the investment in terms of human capital (Ibrahim et al., 2017; Zuo et al., 2018). Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) is more suitable here since soft skills development and practices at work expect to bring better return. Soft skills are personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance and career prospect, and hard skills which tend to be specific to a certain type of task or activity (Cooper and Sawaf, 1997). Soft skills complement hard skills which are the technical requirement of a profession. Right soft skills have significant role in successful career as well as during social interactions in the society (Majid, et al., 2014).

Many employers express that they place a higher priority on soft skills than on the technical knowledge and skills required to do the job. More than a decade, management researchers are emphasizing on the understanding and practice of soft skill in business organization. This practice will be beneficial not only for business executives but it will help to upgrade the civilization of human existence in the society. Basically there is no right or wrong soft skill but there are some types of soft skill that the employer loves to see more in their employees such as communication skill, leadership skill, problem solving skill (Cooper and Sawaf, 1997; Majid, et al., 2014). Hard skills are academic and technical. Soft skills are the interpersonal and life skills that help leaders to share their hard skills effectively. Therefore, the existing literature drives further study on soft skill practices and its impact on job performance. Soft skills at present are the first priority of business executives and leaders since the practice of soft skills make them successful in modern business organization (Wesley, et al., 2017). Soft skill enhances individual ability to work well in the team and it motivates employees for achieving common goal (Wesley et al., 2017). Soft skills of employees ensure effective communication with stakeholders for better teamwork (Alam et al., 2010). It has become a new trend to look for soft skills among the candidates while hiring new employees (Taylor, 2016). Soft skills help one to get and keep a job as well as successfully influence and lead others at work (Rao, 2017). Job characteristic theory by Hackman and Oldham (1976) also

mentioned that when a job has skill variety then individual tends to enjoy the work and perform better due to high internal work motivation.

Customer based and managerial jobs require soft skills most (Nwokah and Ahiauzu, 2009) since practice of soft skills help the employees to think critically for taking meaningful decision instantly (Szilárd, et al., 2018). Practice of soft skills also enable individual to manage job role effectively with challenges and opportunities (Tang, 2018; Zaman, et al., 2018). Soft skills boost up competency of the employees due to the presence of ethics, moral and professional skills (Tang, 2018). Strong work ethics and drive to complete task among employees get higher for the presence of soft skills (Yearley, 2017). Soft skills among employees are also needed in manufacturing based industry though technical or hard skills are given more priority (Zaman, et. al., 2018). Soft skill practices help the employee to stay focused and positive. It influences individual for interactions among the stake holders. Active listening, leadership and management style have significant role play in achieving success in the organization (Ngang, et al., 2015). Therefore, the practice of soft at work is essential for success with connection and cooperation among people in the organization.

Soft skills possessed by professional are correlated with job performance since they have more communication and bargaining skills (Garwood, 2012; Ibrahim et al., 2017). Soft skills of employees like communication, leadership, conflict management, need for achievement and cognitive thinking are directly related with success of any projects in an organization since these influence human behavior (Zuo et al., 2018). Knowledge sharing and social skill of employees are essential to interact with people and these skills help employee to take right decision at work (Yun & Lee, 2017; Islam, Jantan, Khan, Rahman, & Monshi, 2018). Social skill helps employee to identify the problems and develop solutions. If the managers of the organization have leadership quality and possess other soft skills, then the organizational performance gets higher (Nang, et al., 2015). Interpersonal skills, stress management, self-awareness, adaptability of employees contribute towards improving job performance (Zhang and Fang, 2013). Zhang and Fang (2013) have also found in their study that emotional intelligence (which is also a soft skill) is significantly correlated with employee job performance. Therefore, soft skill acquisition and practice have positive impact on employee job performance.

Methodology

This study explores the relationship between soft skill practiced by managers and employees' job performance in Ready Made Garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh. Therefore, data has been collected in two phases. Firstly, two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) have been conducted among the employees of RMG sector in Bangladesh in June, 2019. In second phase, five in-depth interviews have been conducted from the managers of RMG. The respondents must have work experience for at least 2 to 5 years, so that data collection become accurate. Participants of both data collection methods are working for more than two years in RMG sectors in Bangladesh. The respondents have been assigned on voluntarily basis without any monetary reward. Therefore, this study is using purposive sampling method as prescribed by Yin (2003). Unit of analysis in this study is individual manager and employee. Since the researchers know the participants from personal network, conducting interview and collecting data become easier and convenient.

All the participants of in-depth interviews are RMG managers working in Bangladesh. In-depth interview in one to one basis is the personal approach to collect data directly from the respondents in order to know the individual opinion regarding the subject matters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Saunders, et al., 2012; Novikov & Novikov, 2013). A semi-structured interview questions have been prepared for the discussion and the respondents are informed through email about the area of discussion in the interview. After receiving the consent and appointment from the respondents, all the interviews were conducted in July, 2019. Participants' written

consent have been taken before the interview for ethics permit. All the interviews were recorded with the consent of respondents and the issues discussed are transcribed verbatim and cross-checked by both researcher and participants for data accuracy. Appointment for the interviews was decided based on the availability of the respondents and the flow of the discussion are free from any sort of control and biasness.

This study has conducted two Focus Group Discussions (FGD) in a garment and a textile mill in Bangladesh. Names of the RMG factories are kept anonymous as part of research ethics. The FGDs have taken place in June, 2019. FGD is a semi-structure data collection method from a selected group of people to discuss issues and concerns listed by researcher or facilitator (Powell and Single, 1996; Rabiee, 2004). It is a qualitative research approach to collect data from target audience. Questions are asked for the interactive group where participants feel free to talk on the issue. FGD becomes popular and important for the research in business and social science, as group discussion discover the information that other also believe and all those data are less accessible without discussion (Morgan and Spanish, 1984). All the data collected through FGD are based on the synergy of group interaction. FGD also enable researcher to gather larger amount of information in shorter period, and the information can be used at the preliminary or exploratory stage of any study (Powell and Single, 1996). Data collected through FGD have been analyzed through systematic and rigorous process where data are coded for key issues (Morgan and Spanish, 1984). However, the process of data analysis begins during the data collection. According to Rabiee (2004), rich data must be generated by skillfully facilitating the discussion. In this research study, all the FGD have been tape recorded by the permission of participants, and all the complements by the participants have been noted down. After that, transcript has been re-written by listening tape record for further verification. The next stage is identifying the thematic framework and highlighting the data. Data are then sorted out and interpreted based on the context, internal consistency, frequency and extensiveness of comments (Rabiee, 2004). Result has been presented with reference to corresponding participants. For example, F2:1 means 1st participant of the 2nd FGD who is a packaging worker. This study is phenomenological research which allows to show the embodied and experimental meaning of central concern (Finlay, 2009; Stake, 1995). The interviews are conducted in English and the interview data are transcribed by the researchers themselves. Since this study is conducted in a small scale, no software has been used rather interview data have been coded manually by the researchers. The nature of the data analysis is deductive in nature and it follows a predetermined structure guided by experts. Common themes in each question are identified and it concludes the influence of soft skills practice on employees' job performance in a synthesize manner.

Findings and Discussions

This part of the study represents the uses of soft skills by managers and how it influences employees' job performance. Data from both in-depth interviews and FGDs are merged together based on the common themes. The participant's views on specific issues are mentioned and discussed below.

Theme One: Participants' Opinion about Soft Skills Concept and the Importance

Participants from every group acknowledged that their understandings regarding soft skills. All the managers are aware of the concept of soft skills and how these are applicable in managing employees. However, only few soft skills are used in RMG as stated by managers. On the other hands, participants in FGDs mostly do not understand the concept since most of the participants are workers and their literacy level is below average. All the participants later on realized the importance of using soft skills both in work and personal life. According to participant two (P2) of the in-depth interview, *"About soft skill what I understand is its one's personal*

attributes of behavior. It's all about how one maintains relationship with other. Like interpersonal behavior. It also includes communication with people and team work capacity''. P5 has also expressed the same and mentioned that *“I believe that soft skill has good impact on human relation. Soft skill includes the capacity of having good communication, problem solving, leading, adaptability, creativity, coordinating, maintaining relationship and so on”*. All the participants of the interviews mentioned almost the same views about the concept of soft skills. Therefore, it indicates that their knowledge on soft skills are adequate and they understand different types of soft skills.

When the topic soft skills have been discussed in FGDs, some participants have asked to clarify and define the concept as this is very new to them. After giving the definition and explanation about the soft skills, many participants smiled and one participant (F.1.4) replied that *“Oh, yes! I know this idea but I don't know the terminology. We the workers always feel the necessity of having a mentor among us. Our managers are not always behaving like mentor and they often get bossy with us and give us hard time. But, when our supervisor and line manager behave nicely with us we feel motivated. If our boss can inform us about certain decision earlier, it becomes easier for us to take preparation of the task”*. Another participant from FGD-2 (F.2.5) has mentioned that *“soft skills are not widely practiced in RMG. Our supervisors and managers are always concern about the production target. They often do not mention the deadline and ask for overtime all in sudden. We somehow are bound to follow the instruction but we cannot work well as sudden decision makes us feel like slave and our work-life balance is not given a priority”*. Thus, it can be mentioned that workers in RMG are undervalued by their managers since managers are not good in practicing soft skills.

Regarding the importance of soft skills, every participants of interviews (who are managers) mentioned almost the same opinion. According to P2, *“soft skills are needed in every aspect of professional life. I need to communicate properly with my managers and subordinates. If I am good in doing that my job gets easier. When I motivate and inspire my workers with non-financial incentives, their performance gets higher. I work as team member though I am the boss and everyone considers me as part of them and their cooperation and support are always there for me”*. P1 stated that, *“behaving like leader and acting as team member help me to influence my subordinates. My critical thinking and innovative ideas of managing workers help me to manage my workforce more efficiently”*. Participant three (P3) has explained the importance of soft skills practice in different way. P3 said, *“I am very busy this week and I told you about my flight next morning. You phoned me 3/4 times and I am sorry I could not talk. Its now I am here and I just had my late dinner. I am still interested to talk with you. Its because you somehow convinced me and made me interested to talk on your research area. This is a soft skill I must say. Its your soft skill. I am your ex-boss and you left my organization 10 years before. You still in touch with me and we often meet and write. So I never feel like you are away. This is communication and it's a very good and effective soft skill that one should have. You still ask for opinion from me, that means you consider me as your mentor. That's my soft skills”*.

Soft skills have become significant both in personal and profession life. According to Tang (2018), soft skills are personal traits that enhance interaction, job performance and career growth. Rao (2015) stated that soft skills are essential for both career growth and social competence. Someone possess soft skill has more social skills that enables the person to be accomplished more. Unlike hard skills (technical skills) which are learned by training, soft skills are more related with emotions and insights that are very difficult to measure and evaluate (Wesley et al., 2017). Possessing soft skills help individual to connect psychologically with others. Therefore, practice of soft skill helps individual and the organization to understand the needs of others, and directs them to act accordingly for mutual benefits (Wesley et al., 2017; Zaman et al., 2018).

Theme Two: The most commonly practiced soft skills in RMG

There are various soft skills that human being can practice. Hurtz and Donovan (2000) revisited the 'Big Five' traits of taxonomy and mentioned that openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism are the most significant soft skills that have direct positive relationship in job performance. Therefore, big five model of personality traits have significance in developing the soft skills of individual. Hogan (1983) introduced the socio-analytic theory of personality where it is also mention that getting along with other for mutual benefits, different aspects of soft skills plays important role. Total fourteen soft skills were identified in the study of Zaman et al., (2018). These are communication skill, critical thinking ability, team work, professionalism, strong work ethics, attitudes and enthusiasms, creativity, reliability, research skill, networking, agreeableness, conscientiousness, adjustment and leadership skills. However, all these skills are not equally important at work place. Leadership, communication, critical thinking, teamwork, professionalism and work ethics are playing significant role both in professional and personal life (Tang, 2018; Wesley et al., 2017; Yeardeley, 2017; Zaman, et al., 2018). During the in-depth interviews, participants have been asked to inform about the soft skills that they use more frequently to manage their subordinates. Participants of FGDs (who are mainly workers in RMG) have also been asked to mention about their soft skills practice and their expectation from their managers regarding soft skills.

According to participant two (P2), *"The most common soft skills that I personally practice a lot are communication, mentoring and critical thinking. We face many problems dealing with production workers. To solve this problem, I need to thing critical for innovative solution or ideas. That's why I think critical thinking is my most used soft skills for my job"*. P1 said, *"I prefer to communicate more often with my team, inspire them on a regular basis, behave nicely with workers, think on problem in advance"*. Other participants of the in-depth interviews emphasize equally on communication, leadership, team work and critical thinking. Three participants stated about adaptability. According to P5, *"it is crucial to adhere and adopt changes. The way I managed my subordinates ten years before is not the same today. Things have changed a lot. Workers are more aware of their rights and benefits. They are educated. They use social medias and well informed about the opportunity. So, I practice different innovative ways in managing my subordinates and change my strategy based on circumstances"*. Thus adaptability is also another soft skill commonly practiced by RMG managers. Interestingly, participants of the FGDs also expect the same soft skills from their managers except adaptability. But they emphasize on problem solving capacity of managers. When managers communicate and convince the workers about certain issues, then workers can perform with motivation (F.1.1; F.2.2 & F.2.4). Workers in RMG expect their managers to act as mentor and leader (F.1.6; F.2.3 & F.2.5). When supervisor is good in making team and influencing everyone to work in a team, then performance of every individual gets higher (F.1.3; F.1.4 & F.2.6). Therefore, the most commonly used soft skills by managers in RMG are communication, leadership, team work and critical thinking. The following figure shows the summary of the findings from FGDs and interviews.

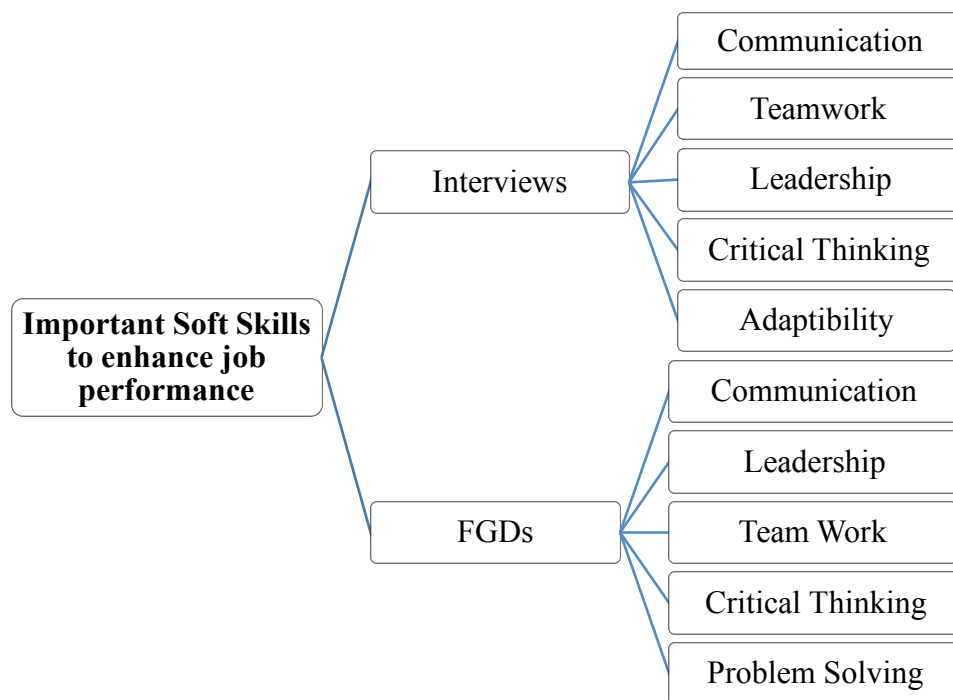


Figure-1: Soft Skills Needed for Job performance (Appendix 1)

Theme Three: The Relationship between Soft Skills Practiced by Managers and Employee Job Performance

Participants emphasized on the use of soft skills at work. They have mentioned the ways to link soft skills for job performance. P4 has mentioned that *“I think there is direct relationship between soft skills practice and employees’ performance. We need to deal with our employees in a strategic way. We to cooperate, collaborate, communicate and consult with our subordinate quit often to run the operation and that actually require me to have soft skills. We often need to negotiate with subordinates for the production target. We need to deal with them in a critical manner. So yes my soft skills have impact on my employee’s performance”*. Soft skills refer both personal qualities and interpersonal skills that make individual emotionally intelligent and engaged with other in order to bring desired state of affairs (Zaman et al., 2018). Participants of the in-depth interviews stated that soft skills are important to adopt and develop for both work and personal life. They mentioned that practice of soft skills helps them to maintain good relations with colleagues and supervisors. Soft skills can help one to be more acceptable and popular at work (F.1.6; F.2.4 & F.2.6). According to P1, *“We inspire our managers to practice leadership and offer leadership training to them so that they can act as leaders with employees. We also emphasize on working in a team. We recently conducted a workshop where managers of different departments participated and the workshop was on how to work in a team. We gave some puzzle tasks and problems intentionally to see how the managers deal with it. That task was related with the behavioral issues of managers that were never pointed before”*. Since the employers are emphasizing on different soft skills to be developed among managers, it indicates that soft skills are required for job performance. There are common four soft skills widely practiced by managers in RMG sector in Bangladesh. These are communication, leadership, team work and critical thinking. Both managers and workers of RMG feel the same importance as discussed above.

Leadership is widely demanding skills at work as found in this study. P4 mentioned, *“managers in manufacturing sectors need to be very careful about workers’ issue. Anything goes wrong, worker can start protesting. Workers are often reluctant to adhere. That is why managers need to have the capability to convince workers for which they must have leadership*

skill”. P5 has mentioned, ‘*Well, managers play an important role in motivating employees. Supervisor needs to act as mentor which requires soft skill to exercise*’. Leadership skill exercised by managers can influence employees and empower them to work with full potential (Hamstra et al., 2014). The leadership skill is also considered as an important skill for all employees. It is one of the most important factors contributing to effective governance. If managers act like leaders then work spirit among employees increases (Hamstra et al., 2014). Leadership skill of employees unites everyone toward new ideas, dealing with challenges and focusing on opportunities for growth and prosperity of the organization (Hamstra et al., 2014; Tang, 2018). Leadership practice by supervisor influences employees’ work behavior and trust (Robertson, 2013; Tan and Lim, 2009). Employees develop trust when supervisors act like leader (Nienaber, et al., 2015). That is why leadership has significant influence on job performance.

Communication is the second skill that both managers and workers emphasized for high job performance. According to a manager of RMG (P2), ‘*First thing I always do is to consult with my team. I take their opinion though my decision gets into action. Since I take their opinion, they feel empowered and consider me as mentor and part of their team*’. Regarding communication, another manager has mentioned, ‘*I always keep my subordinates updated and they feel that their knowledge gets improved because of my action. So they consider me as knowledge disseminator and their boss*’. Communication skills are key competencies of the employee on mutual understanding, inclusion of different ideas, and work towards growth and sustainability of the organization (Kinman, 2010; McGreavy, et al., 2015; Zaman, et al., 2018). Reynolds (2010) mentioned that mathematical problem and critical decision making get easier when individual has effective communication skill. The ability to communicate enables employees to understand the expected work behavior and perform their duties effectively and efficiently for business success (Kinman, 2010; Zaman, et al., 2018). Therefore, communication skills are essential for job performance.

The third most commonly practiced soft skill is team work. Teamwork is an essential ingredient to complete a project. There are several studies showed the effectiveness of team work in improving job performance (Kalleberg, 2009; Criss 2010; Weinstein et al., 2013). Collaboration among employees helps them to solve critical problems and take decision based on mutual understanding (Ngang, et al., 2015). According RMG manager (P2), ‘*team work is helpful for better job performance. When people work in team, everyone is helping each other. Thus, I try to create work team for better performance*’. Teamwork improves work culture and job performance. Teamwork increases work spirit and develops sense of belongingness towards the organization (Ibrahim et al., 2017). Therefore, employees feel more responsible to perform their job duties.

Critical thinking is another soft skill mentioned by all the participants. According to managers of RMG, critical thinking enables them to lead the team smoothly since they are more aware and prepared. P2 stated that, ‘*Critical thinking is important for making decision in right time by forecasting many other possibilities. When someone can think critically, then finding out the solution of any emerging issue is easier. Since managers deal with many workers in RMG, they often face many problems arises on workplace cooperation. Workers in RMG often demand many issues like rising salary or offering any financial or non-financial benefits. They often stopped working and do go slow intentionally. There are many incidents occurs unexpectedly for which managers need to be strategic in decision making where critical thinking ability is more crucial. If managers think critically then they solve many worker’s problems which also reduces labor unrest. They can also manage workers to focus on job and perform at their level best*’. Critical thinking seems a very important soft skill for various types of organization. Though critical thinking is more associated with education, it is now also considered a major element of success at workplace (Zuo et al., 2018). Research shows the

influence of critical thinking on teachers to change their perception in order to determine the education reform (Innabi and Sheikh, 2007). Managers having critical thinking ability tend to be more efficient in managing employees and can resolve problems immediately (Azim, et al., 2010). Employees' critical thinking practice enables them to view problems from different aspects and come up with innovative ideas, promote options and uncover the spinoffs (Zuo et al., 2018). Critical thinking is needed for problem solving, conflict resolution and effective leadership (Allameh, 2018; Azim, et al., 2010). Thus managers having effective critical thinking skills are more successful in managing the team with better outcomes. The above findings basically focus on the importance of using different soft skills and the impact on employees' job performance. When managers practice soft skills, employees under their supervision get influence through inspiration, respect, flexibility and openness coming from the managers which ultimately have impact on employees' job performance.

Implication and Conclusion

This study has been conducted on RMG sector of Bangladesh. RMG in Bangladesh is growing comparatively higher than any other sectors and it is contributing to GDP as it has highest export growth in recent years (Hossan, et al., 2012a; Zaman, et al., 2018). RMG sector faces multiple challenges such as labour unrest, lack of infrastructural facilities, irregularities relating to customs, shipping and bond, lack of product and service diversification (Hossan, et al., 2012a; Zaman, et al., 2018). Cheap labour market in Bangladesh attracts foreign investors and the RMG sector is still expanding here due to cost advantages. However, RMG sector needs special attentions due to increasing rate of worker's unrest and the operational hazards in Bangladesh (Hossan, et.al., 2012a). Since, RMG is a manufacturing sector, managing employees with technical efficiency is given more priority, and softs skills are mostly overlooked by managers (Hossan, et al., 2012b; Zaman, et al., 2018). Therefore, this study has investigated the relationship between soft skills practiced by managers and employees' job performance at RMG sector in Bangladesh. This study has revealed that the job performance of employees often depends on how their managers behave and act. The finding of the study reflects the importance of using soft skills perceived by both managers and workers. Among many other soft skills, the most common and useful soft skills in RMG sector are leadership, communication, team work and critical thinking. According to the opinion of participants and relevant literatures, it is clear that there is a direct positive relationship between soft skills practice and employee job performance.

This study is significant for promoting the practice of soft skills in manufacturing sector like RMG. The study findings give the direction for the application of different soft skills towards performance of employees. The results of the study reveal the subsequent influence of soft skills practice over the job performance. Besides that, it is expected to develop a new model of soft skills practice and job performance. This study has three significant contributions. Firstly, this study is one of the very few studies on soft skills practice set on production based industry from non-western context. Soft skills practice is not very common in production oriented sector like RMG and manufacturing based managers in Bangladesh give more priority towards production efficiency (Hossan, et al., 2012b; Zaman, et al., 2018). Therefore, this study emphasizes on the necessity and significance of soft skills practices in production oriented sector. At the same time, it also explores the role of soft skills practices for higher performance in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. Secondly, this study facilitates future comparative studies on service sector as well as on cross-cultural perspective. The findings of this study has created further opportunity to conduct study on other production based industries available in Bangladesh and around the globe. It also enhances the chance to do comparative analysis on the impact of soft skills between production and service sectors. Thus it identifies the implication of soft skills practice from cross-cultural perspective. Thirdly, the HR practitioners

in Bangladesh specifically in production based industry will be more concerned from now about the practice of soft skills based on the findings and relationships between soft skills practice and employee performance.

Research Limitation and Future Directions

This study has some limitations. Arranging the interviews and FGDs are not easy since the participants are busy and make delay for the appointment. Finding appropriate interview location is difficult. Interviews are affected by noise and crowd. Poor quality of voice record is another barrier encountered that has happened due to crowd and noise. Transcribing data is difficult since it is time consuming and needs cross-check to avoid missing data. Participants do not give enough time to talk and the timing for the interviews are late in the evening. Participants often talk a lot and go beyond the topic. They often do not give chance for follow up discussion. Interviews are conducted in English and it is not their first language. Therefore, words mentioned do not provide actual meaning and expression. Data transcribing is also difficult for the local dialects and accents of the participants though they talked in English. In FGDs, sorting out and interpreting data based on the context, internal consistency, frequency and extensiveness of comments were difficult and repetition occurred on extracted data. If there is any opportunity comes ahead, then the interview will definitely be better and the data will be more accurate. Suitable venue and time will be given priority. There will be the arrangement of good refreshments and gifts for the participants. Since, participants of the interviews are known to the researchers, it may have the chances of biasness. Next time participants will be selected carefully to avoid any biasness. Post interview reflection will be done next and this will improve the quality of data. Finally, future interview will be conducted in the mother tongue of the participants and then it will be translated into English for data accuracy. For efficient data analysis, software like N-Vivo or Atlas.ti will be used in future.

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Appendix 1 (Participants' details for Focus Group Discussion (FGD) & In-depth Interviews)

FGD-1		FGD-2	
SL/ Code	Designation	SL/ Code	Designation
F.1.1	Lasting Worker	F.2.1	Packaging Worker
F.1.2	Sewing Worker	F.2.2	Cutting Operator
F.1.3	Cutting Operator	F.2.3	Production Worker
F.1.4	Finishing Worker	F.2.4	Sewing Worker
F.1.5	Machine Operator	F.2.5	Lasting Worker
F.1.6	Sewing Worker	F.2.6	Quality Controller

SL	In-depth Interviews	Code for participants	Age	Years of experience	Number of subordinates
1	Production Manager, 'A' RMG Company	P1	45	20	255
2	Quality Control Manager, 'B' RMG Company	P2	38	15	45
3	Head of the plant unit, 'C' RMG Company	P3	50	27	1700
4	Marketing Manager, 'D' RMG Company	P4	40	17	32
5	Planning Manager, 'E' RMG Company	P5	42	19	25